

A Fast of God's chusing,
Plainly opened,

*For the help of those poor in spirit, whose
hearts are set to seek the Lord their God
in New-England, in the solemn
Ordinance of*

A FAST

Wherein is shewed 1. The nature of such a FAST. 2. The
Testimony God will give thereunto of his gracious acceptance
3. The special Seasons wherein God will bear witness to such
A FAST. 4. Some helps to Faith that it shall be so.
5. Why such a FAST is so acceptable and successfull.
6. How much this concerns Gods people in *New-England.*

*Preached on a Fast called by publick Au-
thority, On 26. 1. 74.*

By **THOMAS THACHER,**
Pastor of a Church in *Boston.*

B O S T O N,
Printed by *John Foster,* 1678.

356. THACHER (REV. THOMAS). A Fast of God's
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land, in the solemn Ordinance of a Fast . . . preached on a
Fast called by publick Authority, On 26.1.74. Small 4to,
green crushed levant morocco gilt, gilt edges by Riviere. In
two places the bottom margins have been cut close removing
the catch-word.

Boston: Printed by John Foster, 1678

* VERY RARE. Printed by the First Printer in Boston.

To the Reader.

BOTH Scripture and experience hath made it manifest to the world, that a *Religious Fast*, when duly attended, is a Duty of no small importance and advantage to the people of God. But those spiritual performances, which if rightly managed, are the most beneficial, have a special difficulty and contrariety to flesh and blood accompanying them. So is it an hard work to keep a *Fast* in such a manner, as that it shall become an acceptable Day unto the Lord: whence also it cometh to pass, that very few even amongst those that outwardly observe Fasting Dayes, are acquainted with the inward, spiritual, & acceptable part of the duty. There have been that as to what is external in such Services regard not the divine precept; Some thinke the Prophet Isaiah (in that Chapter (which is partly and judiciously opened in the ensuing Sermon) reproveth Enormities in that kind. And although mercy is better then Sacrifice, nor may we urge any severities beyond what the word of God doth impose, yet it is to be feared that many amongst us do not make due conscience of that outward abstinence which the rule, and which the nature of the duty doth require. It is most true, that the Kingdome of God doth not consist in meat and drink, nor is Fasting in it self any part of Religion; when it is called worship, it is by a Trope, as being a special adjunct of some extraordinary worship, yet for men to exact labours, or to find their own pleasures upon such daies, is an high transgression. Others there are, that as to externals will be very exact; nay, over-righteous. Whence all that they do is before the Lord no better then loathsome formality & hypocrisie. The Evangelist informs us that it was customary amongst the Jews to fast twice a week. And the Jewish *writers* tell us particularly, that it was upon the 2d. and 5th. day of the week, *deceverans magistry nostri ut jejunaretur diebus secundo et quinto, propter tres res, viz. propter destructionem Templi, propter legem Confagratam, & propter peccatum divini nominis.* In imitation of whom some Christians call two dayes of the week *Fast dayes*, albeit that they might not be thought to Judaize, they have not fixed upon the same dayes the Jews did. But to what end is a multitude of these

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*Volume 9.
junii, Fol. 54.*

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one, if consulted in? Do men think that this will be heard on high, that they shall have acceptance in Heaven, merely because they fast? Certainly, if there be not serious preparation for such dayes, unfeigned Humiliation, and Contrition in them, Reformation after them, dayes of Humiliation will become dayes of provocation, before that God, who will never suffer himself to be mocked by any of the Sons of men. When the most solemn and extraordinary duties of Religion degenerate into Formality, it causeth the God of judgement to come near. Historians have observed, that *Pompey* seized upon the Temple on the Jews solemn Fasting day; Also that upon one of their publick Fasts *Sassan* took *Jerusalem*; the Lord thereby testifying against the Formality of that degenerate generation. And indeed dayes of Humiliation without Reformation, are no other, nor no better then a *Form of godliness without the power of it*. So the formal Jews in *Isaiah's* time. Notwithstanding their frequent fasts, they persisted in doing their own wills, (and are therefore said to *find their own pleasure*) though contrary to the commanding will of God. They continued to oppress, and exact Labours of those that by the Law of God should have been set at liberty, *Ier. 34. 17*. Vexatious Law suits, (*swiming with the scum of wickedness*) and other Contentions were rise amongst them, after dayes of Humiliation; If a poor man were by any injurious Contract fallen into their hands they would not loose those Bonds of wickedness. The Lord therefore by his Prophet tells them, that as ever they desired God should regard their Fasts, those prevailing iniquities should be reformed, and the contrary duties practised. To the same purpose, *Jeremiah* upon a solemn Fasting day, *Ier. 9. 6, 7*.

Now that the Lords people amongst us may be awakened and warned against resting in any lifeless Formalities, or in Humiliation without Reformation, is the design of the Reverend and worthy Author in this practical and useful Sermon of his Discourses of this nature are never unreasonable, since no Age passeth wherein there is not afforded matter & ground sad enough to warrant the performance of the duty urged.

Although the *Nam. Terentianus* speaketh nothing for stated Fasts or Festivals, *Terentianus* before his *Admonitiones* wrote truly, that religious Fasts are to be observed *pro temporibus & causis*, as the Lord shall providentially call thereto; Indeed *Arrian* was sometimes charged with Heresy, because he withstood the imposition of those

Ios. phus de A. tiq. Iud. or. 1. 14. c. 8

Mr. Galeker Auctor in Ios. 58.

To Iulian de Ieiun. Epiph. Ha. gus de H. ref. c. 58.

and the like Formalities, but that was in an Age when the darkness of Superstition began to over spread the Christian World. Nevertheless the word is clear, that at sometimes frequency in the observation of this service ought to be attended. *John's Disciples kept many dayes of Fasting and Prayer, probably (as a learned Interpreter constriveth) upon occasion of their Masters being imprisoned, which providence was a sufficient call unto them, so be much in extraordinary seekings unto God, and Humiliation before him that (if possible) they might not be deprived of such a faithful and eminent Teacher. And although the tenderness of Christ toward his own Disciples was such as that he would not at first enjoin frequent Fastings upon them who had not been accustomed to such severities, lest (as new wine is ungrateful. and will be rejected by those who have tasted that which is more Pleasant) being suddenly put upon precepts too strong for weak Disciples, they should be discouraged; yet the Lord doth intimate that dayes of persecution and general affliction would at last befall them, when they should be providentially called (and their practice be suitable) unto frequent Fastings.*

*Grotius in
Math. 9. 14*

*Craddock
Harmon. c. 3
Sist. 2c.*

It is marvellous to consider (for his Spirit knoweth what shall come to pass in the world, and inclineth the hearts of his Messengers accordingly) how God many times causeth the words of his Servants in their publick Ministrations to fall in with his providential dispensations; of which we have some Instance in the Sermon herewith emitted; which was delivered some years agoe, even a little before our late troubles. The Lord knew that *Boston*, yea, that *New-England* would have cause for many dayes of Humiliation; and therefore stirred up the heart of his Servant, before hand to give instructions and Directions concerning the acceptable performance of so great a duty. Some that were affected in hearing the Word preached, and that did in short hand take what was delivered, have Importuned the Reverend Author to give way unto its publication, unto whose desires he hath at last conceded. And I know not but that the publication of what is in this way presented may be as seasonable as the preaching of it at first was. For if my Conjectures fail not, the dayes are at hand when *New-England* will have as great cause as ever to attend Humiliations and supplications before the most High. There is no general Reformation visible in *New-England*, nor so much as an heart to comply with the Scripture expedient for that end. We have seen the re- Horse

To the Reader.

amongst us, even bloody judgements and desolations, but are not
bettered thereby: Now there is a pale Horse come, and his Name
that sits thereon is Death; Tears are falling, our Heaven, and our
Earth are shaking; What will come next, who can say? The De-
cree hath not as yet brought forth, wherefore such a Fast as the
Lord hath chosen, would be a blessed means to lengthen out our
Tranquility; And O that *New-England* knew in this her day the
things that belong to her peace.

Increase Maibor

Boston 2. mo.

1678.

Isaiah

Isaiah. 58. 3, 6.

Is it such a Fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his Soul, &c. Is not this the Fast that I have chosen, &c?

IT is (my beloved) hard work yea, one of the hardest parts of the work of the Ministry, to awaken a people that are rocked a sleep in sin; especially a professing people, that are lifted up to eminent degrees in profession, exalted with great privileges, and have their hearts raised with these things unto great pride, this (I say is a great and difficult work of the Ministry to awaken such: But such a People this Prophet had to do withal, and therefore you see what he must do, ver. 1. *Cry aloud, spare not, stretch thy throat, spare no pains, lift up thy voice like a Trumpet, and shew my people their transgressions, &c. O's house of Jacob their sins.* They had Watchmen amongst them, but they did not watch; *Dogs that did not bark,* Isai. 56. 10. and therefore the Prophet must *cry aloud*, and shew them their sins. Why? were they so vile a people? they were eminent in profession, exalted in privileges, and arrogant in both, as appears in five or six things. 1. *They seek me daily,* ver. 2. 2. *They delight to know my ways.* 3. *They did Righteousness,* and they forsook not the Ordinances of God, they were a practicing People, as well as a knowing people, and further, they enquire and ask after the Ordinances of Justice, and profess great delight in approaching to God, and that not only in common and ordinary duties, but extraordinary, ver. 3. *We have fasted, and we have afflicted our Souls in our Fast,* and yet saith God to the Prophet: *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a Trumpet, and make them to know their transgressions &c.* They were yet a people that did need awakening notwithstanding all this.

But when was this people in this frame? and when was there such matter of complaint against them? 1 Answer in general, it was when they did keep hypocritical Fasts, which are here described, ver. 3, 4, & they did Fast, but yet they did not Fast; it was a Fast (as to the external observation,) when it was not a Fast, as to the spiritual Efficacy and right performance of this holy Service. They were lifted up with their
Service

Service performed, and quarrelled with God, and complained, as if some notable injury were done them, in that they used Gods remedy for their malady, and yet their malady was not removed.

More particularly. This seems to me to have reference to the dayes of *Hezekiah*; You knew what glorious dayes they were, and how zealous he was in Reformation, insomuch, that he brake in pieces the brazen Serpent, which *Moses* had made which they had so long admired and burnt Incense to, 2 *King*. 18.4. and what solemn Fasts did they keep? and what delight had they in approaching unto God, 2 *Cron*. 30.21. the Children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem, kept the Feast of unleavened bread seven dayes, with great gladness, and the Priests and Levites praised the Lord, day by day, singing with loud Instruments unto the Lord. There was great joy; But alas as soon as these things were well over, and they had purged out Idolatry in *Chap*. 32.1. After these things, and the establishment thereof, *Senacherib* comes up against them, and their wound as to their Civil affairs is not healed. And in the sixth year of *Hezekiah* the ten Tribes are led away by *Shalmanazar*, 2 *King*. 18.10. that is in the ninth year of *Hosea* King of Israel. *Samaria* was taken, &c. & because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his Covenant and all that *Moses* the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear them nor do them. Now ver. the 13. In the fourteenth year of King *Hezekiah* *Senacherib* took all the fenced Cities of Judah, &c. Here was Israel carried Captive before, and did not *Jadab* fast then in good *Hezekiah*s dayes? here also is *Jadab* set upon, and the fenced Cities taken; and was *Hezekiah*, and the people asleep all this while? did they not fast and pray? yea, but in the issue *Jerusalem* is besieged, and *Rabshekah* blasphemeth, &c. was not here matter of fasting and prayer? yet notwithstanding all this *Jerusalem* is in danger of destruction, why then? wherefore have we fasted (say they) and thou seest is not? wherefore have we afflicted our Soul, and thou takest no knowledge? here is their quarrel with God, and God Answers this in ver. 3.4. He gives (I say) the Reason of it.

1. By discovering their sins that still remain notwithstanding their Fasts, so that their Fasts were indeed no Fasts.

2. The benefits they should have obtained if their Fast had been a Fast indeed; Is it such a Fast as I have chosen for a man to afflict his Soul for a day, and to hang down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth? &c. oh no! but this is the Fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free? &c.

Doctr. *That a Fast of God chosen, or such a Fast as God hath chosen will certainly bring reasonable prayers of Gods gracious acceptation. When the heart is right for God, and the Fast is ordered according to God it shall certainly obtain mercy, and bring home help and succour from God. Prayer, especially, extraordinary prayer is not only the Key of all earthly Treasures of Goodness, which God hath laid up for the Sons of men on Earth, but the Key of heavenly Treasures in Christ Jesus also.*

I shall observe this method in managing this Subject. 1. I shall open unto you the nature of a Fast, and such a Fast as God hath chosen.

2. I shall shew you those Testimonies which God will give of his gracious acceptation unto such a Fast. 3. I shall endeavour to shew you the seasons wherein God is wont to give, and his people may expect such manifest Testimonies of his gracious acceptation. 4. I shall labour to help your Faith with some invincible Arguments and demonstrations of this Truth, and then the Reasons of the point, and lastly, how much this concerns us, a people so Circumstanced as we are.

1. For the nature of a Fast you may take this imperfect definition or description of it not taken strictly, only for an adjunct or means of worship, but more largely as I suppose in my Text, and so a Fast is an extraordinary part or act of Gospel worship wherein for a convenient Season we abstain from the comforts of this life, and upon due examination of our ways towards God, and consideration of Gods wayes towards us, we make a solemn and real profession that we justifie God and judge our selves, we justifie God for the evil of affliction that we either feel or fear and judge our selves for the evil of transgression which we find within us or that hath passed from us, we solemnly profess godly sorrow and repentance for the evil of sin; we solemnly profess that we seek mercy and grace from God in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and sorrows, we solemnly profess that we with all readiness forgive others that have offended us, as we hope to be forgiven of God, and lastly we solemnly engage and bind our selves to reform the evil of our wayes, and to walk before God in new obedience according to his word for the time to come. There is much of Religion, lies in the right understanding of a Spiritual Fast. Therefore I say first, *Of a Fast.*

The very notion of a Fast speaks abstinence. a Fast is that wherein a man denyeth himself the use of ordinary things, whereto he is accustomed and necessitated for some certain ends and for a certain season;

if there be not a denying your selves ordinary comforts, there is no Fast, and if not in order to worship, it is not a religious Fast. And therefore though this be but an adjunct of worship: yet its an adjunct appointed by God to abstain from your ordinary comforts, and that in three things.

1. *To abstain from meat and drink wholly, if strength of nature will bear it, if not, so much as mercy and necessity will permit;* This at least is commanded of old, *Exod. 4. 16.* neither eat nor drink three dayes, night nor day, &c. she appointed a three dayes Fast, which those Countries might better bear, and upon that extraordinary occasion they might not eat nor drink, night nor day, so *Nineveh* they must not eat nor drink, they are forbidden not only wine, but water, *Jonah. 3. 7.*

2. *It is a part of the abstinence requisite to this duty, to abstain from our wonted Ornaments.* To adorn the body in the day of Fast is a transgression of the Rule of fasting, *Exod. 33. 4, 5, 6.* there they are commanded to put off their Ornaments, and they were wonted also to cloath themselves in Sackcloth, now the rigour of this according to the darkness of those shadowing times is not exacted from us, yet there is a proportion to be observed. The King of *Nineveh* (though but the King of *Nineveh* and not the King of *Israel*) yet he layes aside his Robes and put on Sackcloth, and that was a prevailing Fast, for it was a self humbling Fast: And they were wont also to sprinkle dust and ashes upon their heads, and to express all manner of self despising and self abomination. If you be loth to put off your Ornaments, then its an humbling, and if it be an humbling, you ought to abstain from them with other your ordinary comforts, in an extraordinary humiliation.

3. *An abstaining from all your lawfull imployments and sports, and recreations, yes, even the pleasures of a Married life,* *1 Cor. 7. 5. Joel 2. 16:* Let the Bridegroom come out of his Chamber, and the Bride out of her Closet, &c. there must be no sports nor pastimes. In a word, such abstinence is required whereby the body may be afflicted, *Isa. 58. 3. Lev. 23. 29. 30.* and *Dan. 10. 2, 3, 12. Ezra 8. 21.* And this abstinence must continue at least from Evening to Evening, for so must you keep the Sabbaths, &c. not only your weekly Sabbaths, but fasting and Feasting Sabbaths, *Lev. 23. 32.* from Evening to Evening shall you celebrate your Sabbath! Its a vain shift to say this is spoken concerning Sabbaths only upon special occasions, for it concerns weekly sabbaths, *Lev. 3. 2, 3.* and these also.

2. Now this very outward abstinence as an help to the worship in the day, and so the whole Fast is a Gospel duty, that is, it is a duty directed unto. under the Covenant of grace, and not appertaining to the Covenant of works; for the Covenant of works did not admit of any day of Atonement: But it is the Gospel that appoints dayes of Atonement, and it is required in the Gospel, as our Saviour saith, *when the Bridegroom is absent the Children of the Bride-Chamber shall Fast, the Bridegroom is Christ, and the Children are Believers under the Gospel, and when he is absent, that is in Heaven, before he returns again there shall be times of Fasting. Math. 9. 15. Can the Children of the Bride-Chamber mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them, but the dayes shall come that he shall be taken from them, and then they shall Fast,* and the Apostle gives direction how they should manage themselves in Fasting and Prayer, *1 Cor. 7. 5. and therefore its a Gospel duty.*

3. But yet (though a Gospel duty) it is an extraordinary duty, Fasting is not an every weeks duty in a constant Course, as the Pharise thought, *Luk. 18. 12 saying, I Fast twice a week.* God hath appointed six dayes for labour and one for a Sabbath and therefore for men to appoint to themselves constant Sabbaths, besides the Sabbath of the Lord, is will-worship, and not acceptable to God. This then is not for Ordinary but special occasions; as first when there is some notable or eminent publick Danger, as in the dayes of *Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 20.*

4. So when some notable duty is to be performed which is very difficult and hazardous, then is a season for a Fast as it was with *Esther, Chap. 4. 14. 15. 16.*

Again, when there is some great sickness lying upon those that are near and dear unto us, *Psal. 35. 13, 14. But as for me, when they were sick my clothing was sackcloth, I humbled my Soul with Fasting, and I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother, I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.* A friend and brother or Mother, or near Relations, when they are sick and weak and in dangerous condition, it calls for Fasting, there is then opportunity and occasion for this duty.

Again, when there is some notable blessing wanting, or we are in danger to loose it: And so when a person or people are fallen under some great transgression, whereby God may be provoked to indignation against them, its a time of Fasting and mourning, thus *Jer. 9. 4, 5, 6* in the case of their marrying strange wives, and polluting the holy seed. So when God goes forth against a people in some notable calamity, or threatening judgment; as when Israel fled before the ene-

6
 2. *And of God's Calling*
 Now, Joshua and the elders so said; *Josh. 7. 13.* So is every notable change or turn of a mans life, as the undertaking of a Calling or some great Voyage, then is a time to begin with Fasting and prayer, to implore the aid of Gods gracious presence, his guidance, conduct & salvation: Thus did Ezra, when he was going up from Babilon. *Ezra 8. 21, 22, 23.* So that a Fast is not a standing duty, but occasional, as it is now to be observed in the dayes of the Gospel.

3. Concerning the spiritual performance of it, and here first in order to the preparation thereto, there is examination of our own wayes, and consideration of the works of God; these are preparatory, and for want of these it is that mens hearts are utterly indisposed to such spiritual services: *Job. 7. v. 6. to 12. Lam. 3. 38. to 44.* in which you find them considering and bewailing both their own sins, and Gods judgments upon them for sin.

The next thing to be shown, is the very work of a Fast in the very nature of it, and so I call it a real Profession, to distinguish between an acceptable and an unacceptable Fast; I say it is a solemn & real profession. This people professed great delight in Gods Ordinances, and sought the Lord daily: and that they did, and would cleave to God in his appointments: They enquire after his mind, they make great profession, and so exact were they in their Fasts, that they afflicted their souls, and bowed down their heads like a bulrush, and walked mournfully and spread sackcloth and ashes under them, and what could be more as to an outward profession? but their hearts were not engaged in it it was but a Lye a flattering of God, as *Psal. 78. 34, 35, 36, 37.* therefore God upbraids them saying, *Is this the Fast that I have chosen?* But particularly,

1. There is a profession of our justifying God, for the evil of affliction that he brings upon us, and a condemnation of our selves for the evil of our transgressions against the Lord our God. Thus *Dan. 9. 7.* *O Lord, Righteousness belongs unto thee, but unto us confusion of face, as at this day:* *Isa. 53. 16.* they ascribe righteousness to God, though he had laid waste Jerusalem burnt the city, destroyed the temple, scattered the people, and made them captives, yet said Daniel, *I, thou are righteous, and we have sinned.* So Ezra makes a solemn and heart-breaking prayer, *Ezra 9. 6.* *My God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee my God, for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespasses are grown up unto the heavens.*

2. A solemn profession of godly sorrow and repentance of the evil of transgression which we have committed against the Lord. *Psal. 2.*

12. 13. *Neh. 9.* They confess their sins from the beginning of their being a people, and lay such a load upon themselves, as might make their hearts heavy with godly sorrow.

There is a solemn profession that we fly for refuge, to the hope of grace and mercy that is set before us in the Atonement made by Jesus Christ. Thus David, 2 Sam. 1. 2. 15. 16. he upon that occasion laments the plague of his heart, and the wickedness of his fact and laments after the blood of Christ for cleansing, and cries out for a new Creation of his heart, Psal. 51. 10. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right Spirit within me, this is the profession of every one that fasts that he flies for refuge, to the precious blood of Christ for mercy to save him from his sin and Gods judgements, that he may have peace and grace no more to return unto folly.

4. Again, there is a solemn profession in Fasting and Prayer, that we forgive others, as we desire to be forgiven of God, Mark. 11. 25. when ye stand praying forgive, if you have ought against any, that your Father also which is in Heaven may forgive your Trespases; Therefore in this Text he convinceth them by want of this, not to fast aright, *Thy fast for strife and debate, &c. Isa. 58. 4.* They did not heal but strengthen their divisions by fasting and their Fasts were hypocritical, and not according to their profession.

Lastly, There is in it a solemn profession, that we bind our selves to reform what is amiss, and to walk with God in new obedience, especially when you come to God in a solemn way and manner, its a true observation concerning prayer, that you can put no Petition to God for mercy but it implies a promise unto God of new obedience, especially when you come to God in such a solemn way and manner, you either come that you may obtain help for, or against your sin, help to obey, or to continue in obedience. in every Fast there is an implicate making and renewing Covenant with God, which the Saints of God upon these more then ordinary occasions were wont to express; *Neh. 9th.* the last verse. and the whole tenth Chapter, so that in a Fast you solemnly profess that you are grieved for your Transgressions, and seek his grace in Christ, to pardon and heal you; and that all your hope is in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. and that you freely forgive all that have trespassed against you, laying aside all anger, wrath, malice, envy, evil speaking, and whatsoever may be the fruits of such displicency of Spirit against others. you profess that you put the thoughts of these from you, as you desire your sins should be put away from Gods sight, and you engage not to walk in the former course of iniquity,

but that you will set upon it, to do the will of God in all duties according to the Rules of new obedience, its but a mocking of God, a flattery of him with your lips, a lying unto him with your Tongues, if your Spirits be not thus disposed and inclined in such a solemn duty. Therefore further to distinguish, there is a Fast that God hath chosen, and a Fast that he hath not chosen, *Is this the Fast that God hath chosen, to hang down the head like a Bulrush for a day?* &c. and is this all that God requires, to put on a sad face and sad Clothes, and sad thoughts for a day, or to fetch a sigh or two in your Closets, and pray in your Families, and go to the publick worship, and when the day is over to be as you were before, not making Conscience of answering the expectation justly raised upon your profession, but the proud is proud still, and the filthy is filthy still? this is not the Fast which God hath chosen, if you will shew me your Fasts, where are the fruits thereof? but sin is getting ground upon us notwithstanding our Fasts, Schisme, Heresy, Envy, Malice, and strife notwithstanding your Fasts, and all our dayes of Atonement they prevail not to consume, waste and destroy these abominations out of the Land, these are not the Fasts which God hath chosen; Gods Fasts will break the heart for sin and from sin; But your Fasts keep the heart whole, and the life of sin whole within you, never look for a tender heart, if you can but fast away the sense of your sin, and sorrow for sin, & your care & diligent endeavours to walk with God. My heart akesto think of the unfruitful Fasts that are amongst us as to the body of this people, though I know there are precious Souls amongst us that mourn for these things.

But ah *New-England, New-England*! how wilt thou be able to bear the burthen of thy Fasts? There is not a Soul that hears me but fasts either the Fast that God hath chosen, or that he hath not chosen. You doe fast, and therefore this is your profession, that you are sensible of the displeasure of God hanging over your heads, and that you are sorry with all your hearts that you have provoked God; this is the profession of your actions, or else what do you here? You profess that you doe with all your heart entertain motions of love and kindness, where there hath been strife; and doe profess you forgive them, as God hath forgiven you. and that your hearts are full of compassion to afflicted ones, and that your hands shall be open to relieve them according to your ability. Can any of your souls come to seek mercy from God, and have your hearts shut up against the poor and needy, without great hypocrisie? How doe your hearts work toward these things? Consider it in the fear of God.

A Fast of Gods-choſing.

2. What is the Faſt which God hath choſen?

Anſw. It is when the heart is ſincerely and intirely carried forth in a holy Conformity to that which the duty makes profeſſion of? *my Son give me thy heart* ſayes God, God cares not for external performances without the heart, *they are but as the cutting off a Dogs neck,* &c. *Iſa* 66
3. It is an high abomination when you come without a ſuitable heart to a day of Humiliation. There are four things which ſhow a ſuitable heart to a day of Humiliation,

Fiſt. When the ſoul comes with brokenneſs & contrition of heart, when a holy trembling ſeizes upon ſuch a man; when he draw nigh, leſt he provoke God, and procure his indignation, a broken heart and contrite ſpirit begins the day. and goes along through the day, when the ſpirit is indeed ſuited to the duty.

2. There is a penitent ſelf abaſement before God in and by the duty. Theſe Jews (that is the falſe hearted amongſt them, though there were ſome among them that were upright) they quarrel with God, *wherefore have we faſted* ſay they, *and thou ſeeſt not*: but the ſincere ſoul is humbled in the acknowledgment of this, That it were a juſt and righteous thing with God to caſt away his prayers and ſervices; for God owes him nothing &c. and there is a ſtrong and firm reſolution, that (the Grace of God aſſiſting) he will no more return unto vanity.

3 In a Faſt that God hath choſen, the ſoul deſers not; nor delays nor puts off the doing of that work which concerns it to promote the end of its Faſting: You draw nigh to God, that your hearts and wayes may be reformed; do you doe it forthwith. The delaying ſoul, that is putting off his Reformation and Renovation, doth not keep ſuch a Faſt as God hath choſen. If it be not time for you to doe your duty, it is time for you to ſuffer affliction. If it be not time for you to carry on a thorow Reformation, it's time for God to carry on your ſorrows and afflictions toward your deſolation. Theſe delaying ſouls do not keep a Faſt unto God; when you reſolve a Faſt, you muſt reſolve to begin and proſecute this work of turning unto God that very day, and carry it on to the end.

Laſtly. A Faſt which God hath choſen alwayes leaves a warm impreſſion of love one towards another, and to all mankind as God gives opportunity. Oh when you have taſted mercy from God, how merciful will it make you to be to others. Therefore when men are hard-hearted, cruel and harſh and their ſpirits not inclined to mercy, they have been very little with God to what they ought to be.

Again,

Again, Why is this called the Fast which God hath chosen?
 I shall be brief, I shall answer briefly.

Ans. 1. Because that such a Fast doth exactly answer the counsel of Gods will about it, which he had eternally in himself, and which he gives forth to us in his holy Word, & therefore it is referred to its first pattern and exemplar unto the will and choyce of God.

Ans. 2. Is a Fast that God hath chosen, because God prefers this above any other kind of Fast: There are Fasts many, but this God prefers above all: There are Fasts which obtain some answer from God, yet are not like these. You know what Ahab obtained from God by fasting? *1 King. 21. 27, 28, 29.* God had respect to his Fasting and humbling himself, and Ahab obtained a Reprieve thereby, so that the Judgment threatned was not executed in his dayes; but yet Ahab did not fast with such a Fast as God hath chosen, and delights in, and accepts of.

Ans. 3. Because God takes pleasure and hath a gracious respect to his people in it, and after it, the service is acceptable to him when it is a day he hath chosen; and it ascends as the offering of a sweet smelling Sacrifice: this is noted in that the other is not an accepted day to the Lord; but this is a day wherein God takes pleasure in Heaven if there be joy in Heaven when one sinner is converted, how much more when a whole Congregation is thus doing, to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite Spirit, *Isai. 66. 2.* how much more when it is thus with a people.

Ans. 4. He will take his own time to manifest his own gracious acceptance of his people in such a Fast. You are not presently answered (you'll say) as you expected. Be it so, Remember, your time is always, but Christs hour is not yet come, but he that shall come, will come and will not tarry, beyond his own time so, Answer,

Quest. 11. We are come in the second place, to consider what those spiritual or inward benefitts are, whereby the Lord is wont to manifest his gracious acceptance of such a Fast; And in general you may take it as doctain of *Ishobab* when God is pleased to Answer the prayers of his people, he testifies his acceptance thereof, but more particularly, there are three things whereby God discovers his acceptance of such a day as this.

1. When he gives them a praying and fasting frame of Spirit, such a frame as he requires; for this is not in mans power, but it is the gift of Gods grace when God prepares the heart of the humble, he also hears their cry, *Psal. 109. 17.* when God causes your hearts and your Tongues to pray.

pray, he will certainly cause his ear to hear; for he is the Hearer of Prayer. Prayer is a gift of God, *Rom. 8.26. We know not how to pray, but the spirit helps our infirmities*, and God knows the meaning of the spirit in us. When a man prays by his own spirit, his own spirit is under his own command, and therefore he is uniform in his Prayer he is not sometimes straightned, and sometimes enlarged, except it be through the distempers of his Body, or the like: but when a man prays by Gods Spirit, there are some strange out-goings of the heart in prayer, which no mortal is able to command, such enlargedness of heart, such desires after Christ and his grace, such affliction for sin, & earnest longing for deliverance, as no man can possibly command in his own heart, and when God gives such a Spirit, it's an argument of his gracious acceptance. It's a day of Humiliation, when God gives you an humble spirit; it's a day of Abstinence, when God puts into thy heart an earnest desire of divorcement from all sin how pleasant and profitable soever: this is a pledge of Gods gracious acceptance, according to that promise, *Isai. 65.24. before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*

2. When God gives an heart, after fasting and Prayer to put in execution that which concerns our selves in order to the obtaining our spiritual requests & supplications presented unto God: that is when there is a reforming spirit, a purifying spirit, a watchful spirit against sin, when the soul sets himself with more watchfulness & industry to the work of the Lord; and so a people, as in *Nehe. 10.* the whole Chapter, and the last Chap. of *Ezra*, after their humiliation, how active were they for a thorow Reformation, when Church and Court and all in their places endeavour the removal of sin, and making up the breach between God and them, it is a certain demonstration that God is near at hand to Answer them.

3. It is a marvellous gracious Argument of our acceptance with God when he gives in any of those spiritual or outward blessings which are here mentioned in the Text, there are eight glorious priviledges here engaged to such a person or people, 1. Light after darkness, *v.8.* and 10. *then shall thy Lights break forth as the morning, and thy Lights shall arise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon day, &c.* when God gives a poor soul Light after darkness, and Light in obscurity breaking forth as the morning, this is a great benefit. Light signifies not only the enlightning of the understanding, or quickning you with spiritual Light, but all kind of help and consolation, and prosperity, and so darkness signifies all kind of affliction, whether it be sense of sin,

or other sorrow, or the like. There are four things in this.
 First it is Light in darkness, when you see darkness hath covered your Souls that you have not known what your state & condition hath been, and thereupon hath been great affliction and Agony of Soul, and there hath been also great afflictions outwardly. As commonly one affliction goes not alone, or when there hath been distress upon a people, and now God causes Light to spring after darkness, some glimpses of hope, some raisings up of your Spirits, and expectation of good dayes, some comfortable changes of providence, as *Paul* was comforted by the coming of *Titus* which he ascribed to Gods comforting of him, this is Light after darkness.

2. When this Light that is promised is gradual like the Light of the morning that shines more and more unto the perfect day you must not say there is no Light because it is not noon at first, if it be but the dawning of the day, or the Light of the morning star, you have cause to acknowledge it as an Answer of Prayers, if it do but foreshow the beginning of your return from spiritual Captivity, or outward calamity, you are to acknowledge it as a springing Light which shall go on to the perfect day in full perfection of glory.

3. It is a prevailing and overcoming Light, it may be weak at first, and obscured through clouds of darkness and temptation, but it shall be victorious and overcoming at the last.

Lastly, this Light is from the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, God will manifest his gracious acceptance to your Souls when the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, *Mal. 4.2* that is, be it Light in Ordinances, or Light in providences, it is still a Light from the face of Jesus Christ, there is something of Christ in it, there are communion refreshings that shine upon men which do not exalt Christ in the Soul but that saving Light that comes from Christ leads unto Christ, and makes Christ most precious and most glorious unto the Soul, now this is the Light God promises; whereby he will testify his gracious acceptance of those that keep the Fast which he hath chosen.

2. Thy health shall spring forth speedily; that is, when God is pleased to make Fallings healings, now this is his promise herey healing of your Souls, of your Families, of your Churches, of your commonwealths, healing to your affairs, inward and outward, spiritual and worldly, there is some kind of healing will, that God is wont to give forth in the Answer of the Prayers of his poor people.

3. When your Righteousness shall go before you, and the Lord shall guide you continually, *ver. 8.* and *11.* if it be a Fast that God hath chosen,

chosen, this will be the fruit of it, and what is this Righteousness? the last expression openeth the first, *Jehovah your Righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your Reward* for it hath reference to Gods conduct of Israel thorow the wilderness. God went before them in the pillar of Cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, and in time of danger the Angel removed and went behind them as at the Red Sea, *Exod. 14. 19, 20*. So that their *Righteousness* was the Lord in the Cloud. They were a people full of all manner of iniquity, perverseness and Rebellion. Ay, but sayes God, *I have seen no iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel*. Jehovah went before them as a God pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, and so he proclaims his Name, *Exod. 34. and 7*. he had never lead them through the wilderness, but that as their Righteousness he went before them, so when God accepts you graciously, through the Righteousness of his Son Christ Jesus. and so goes before you, this is a benefit whereby he manifests his gracious acceptation, and the phrase signifies three things.

1. That he goes before you to seek a place of rest for you, and so our Lord Jesus Christ is gone before us to Heaven for that end. *Heb. 6. 20* whether the Forerunner is, for us entered, even Jesus. When you see that the Lord Jesus hath gone before you, and hath born affliction for you though he was holy and righteous. he hath born the curse and dyed for you, and rose again, and ascended into Heaven, &c. he is gone to prepare your rest *Joh. 14. 2*. *I go to prepare a place for you*.

2. He goes before you in his word, guiding you in the way wherein you ought to follow him, that you also may attain to rest: and thus he did to Israel in the wilderness, when God sends forth his Light and his truth to inform your understandings, and bows your hearts to obedience according to that proportion of spiritual Light manifested, then he goes before you as your Righteousness.

3. When the Lord goes before you to secure the way unto you as the great Captain of your Salvation, he leads you as he did Israel, into *Canaan*, *Josh. 5. 13, 14, 15* the Lord Jesus goes before you as the Captain of your Salvation. This you shall obtain at the Lords hand when you Fast such a Fast as he hath chosen, and he will tread your Enemies under your feet shortly, the Devil, and the world, and what ever else. And so for a common wealth in time of war, if they fast sincerely. he will go before them and make their way victorious, and their end Triumphant, *Jehoshaphats* Fast. brought them to the Valley of Blessing, *2 Chron. 20. 6. 26*.

4. He will also be your Reward, *vr. 8*. that signifies the gathering Host that comes after the rest of the Army. to gather up the weak and

the feeble. And those that are not able to secure themselves, this is called the gathering Host, as in the March of Israel through the wilderness, there was the tribe of Dan, they were the gathering host, *Numb. 2.v.25.* to the 31. and this is that which David refers to *Psal. 27.10.* *When my Father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.* When thy own heart shall fail, and all succour from friends and thine expectations are cut off from creature helps, then the Lord will gather you up. you are fatherless or widows, or the like, that is in such or such a case of affliction, or under temptations, and you cannot resist them and the Devil sets upon you with mighty force, and you cannot obtain help from any other, in such a case, when you fast the Fast that God hath chosen, God himself will be your Reward, he will come between you and the enemy. *Exod. 14. 19. 20. Isa. 59. 19.*

5. He will satisfie your souls in drought, and make fat your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, &c. *v. 11.* A time of drought is a time of general want of rain and thereupon follows, not only want of water, as in Ahabs dayes, but want of food also; now in this time of drought God promises to satisfie your souls & to make you as a watered garden; that is, whatsoever wants & necessities have been or may be feared to come upon a person or people, yet when they fast the Fast which God hath chosen, he will satisfie their souls in drought & make fat their bones, alluding to Gods dealing with Israel in the wilderness, giving them water out of the Rock, & Manna from heaven which was not only food & water for their bodies, but spiritual food and water for their souls: so God will deal out a sufficient supply of all that good that is needfull for soul or body in this present life. *Psal 33. 19. To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in Famine.*

6. He will make your soul as a watered garden, and as a spring of water, whose waters fail not: *As a watered Garden*, that is, you shall be inclosed, and secured from them that might spoil your roots or your fruits, or that might make any sad and wofull impression upon your foundation, in matter, civil policy, or personal considerations, and you shall not be barrer. unprofitable in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ. A Fast which God hath chosen, is the way to all fruitfulness in all precious fruits like to the garden inclosed, *Cant. 4. 12.* And lest you should fear scarcity after this, saves God, *They shall be as a living spring of water, whose waters fail not, Joh. 4. 14.* the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into Everlasting Life, you shall have springing supplies of outward and spiritual consolation as the matter may require, and when I

say

say consolation, I intend the ground of it as well as the sense of it, that is such supplies of grace, & seasonable knowledg of those supplies, that you shall not but acknowledg in them Gods everlasting loving kindnes

7. There shall be a blessing to your posterity. as well as to your selves, *ver. 12.* and there are three things in it, 1. They shall build the old waists, this wilderness for ought I know hath lain waste from the beginning, and there were never a Civillized people here before, now fasting and prayer is the way to build the old waists of *Judah* and *Israel.* 2. *Thou shalt raise up the Foundations of many generations;* that is, thou, & thy seed. 3. *Thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach;* the restorer of paths to dwell in. many breaches are made in Churches and in common wealth and upon mens Souls, many breaches upon the visible Church of God in the world, who are they that shall repair such breaches? those that observe such a Fast, as God hath chosen. and the restorer of paths to dwell in in the times of confusion, & those hurries that are amongst men about the matters of Religion people loose their paths, and know not how to order their wayes before him to gracious acceptation; you that Fast with *the Fast which God hath chosen,* God will manifest his gracious acceptation of you by making you and your posterity Instruments to hold forth the wayes of God clearly. wherein poor Souls may walk with God, and find peace unto their Soules.

8. Again in the last verse then shalt thou delight thy self in the Lord. &c. There are three things in it, & the sum of all is that such a Fast as God hath chosen shall be powerful and effectual to bring you to the highest happiness; for first, you shall delight your selves in the Lord, you shall have God for your chiefest good, and he will be your portion to all Eternity. 2. You shall ride upon the high places of the Earth. you that are trodden down, shall have a time of Exaltation in a Kingdome that cannot be shaken, and thou shalt be sed with the heritage of *Jacob* thy Father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, that is, after all your sorrows and troubles, you shall find still that God is your feeder, and that not with common food, but *Jacobs* heritage, which was threefold, 1. The blessings necessary for this life.

2. The blessings necessary for his precious Soul. the feeding Ordinances of God, and 3. The Eternal feeding which is promised at the glorious appearance of our Lord *Jesus Christ.* *Rev. 7. 17. the Lamb shall feed them and shall lead them unto living Fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,* are not these glorious privileges and admirable advantages? these are the special favours of God, whereby in due time he will manifest his gracious acceptation of his people.

people, in their fastings and prayers which have been such as himself hath chosen. And thus we have seen the second general point proposed.

3. The next thing is to show the season when God delights to begin to give in the manifestation of his gracious acceptance of his people; it is true, the Seasons God hath reserved in his own power, and therefore we cannot tell you the day, Moneth, or year; but yet there are certain signs that are wont to be Forerunners of Gods gracious manifestations. Therefore,

I shall give you some general Characters for help of your faith and raising up your expectations. as first, when the evil of affliction hath done its work, it may be God holds you long under some spiritual temptation, or outward pressure, you are as a Sheaf in threshing upon the Floor, you have stroke after stroke hardly ever free from Tribulation, yet be content, when affliction hath done its work God will call it back, this was the Centurions Faith, *Mat. 8. 13* afflictions came not forth without a *Go* from God, and as *it hath its Go* from God, so it hath its Commission, it hath a *wise work* to do, its *Da* this also; now when it hath done its work it shall have its *Com*; it shall be called off again. As he afflicts you for your profit so when the end is attained, the affliction shall be removed, it is to make you partaker of his holiness; see then how the work of God prospers in your Souls, under tryals, afflictions and Temptations, &c.

2. When your hearts are quickned to urgent importunity for the blessing on the affliction, you may cry mightily for deliverance from evils felt or feared, these and those distresses that are upon you; but are your souls wrestling with God importunately for the blessing, as Jacob, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me*. Its not the removing of the rod, but the giving in of the blessing that may refresh thee, is it the blessing that thy soul is crying for, certainly God will answer such prayer, as Jacob, after his earnest wrestling with God, sees the face of God in the face of his brother Esau.

3. When your souls are ready to fail for thirst. In all the exercises and trials of Gods people, God still hath a tender care to prevent this sad inconvenience, *Isa. 57. 16*. *I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth, for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made*: Hence David useth this as an argument, *Hear me speedily, my spirit doth fail*.

4. When the enemy is most insolent and violent. If the storm be high and terrible, ordinarily it is not durable, the gust will soon blow

blow over. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a Standard against him. *Isa. 59. 19.* God himself will interpose and engage for your souls, his spirit against your spiritual adversaries, and the wonders of his providence against your outward enemies. *When he saw that there was none to help, then his own arm brought salvation;* when they seem to be under the power of the enemy then it's time for God to work for their deliverance. God will appear (I say)

5. When you are come to a desperate Strand, you must have help or perish; you have already suffered Ship-wrack and are in the midst of the Flood, in the midst of the fiery furnace, in the lions den, having received the sentence of death in your selves, now is the time to trust in the living God who quickneth the dead. *In the wound of the Lord it shall be seen.*

Lastly. That which is most comfortable, when your soul is brought to a quiet and patient submission to the hand and dispensation of God, committing your selves to his sovereign pleasure and waiting patiently for his salvation, certainly your deliverance is near. This is a great mystery whilst a soul is struggling against providence, and is displeased with Gods dispensation towards it, there is cause to fear that deliverance is far off; but when it comes to submit, deliverance is near, and pledges of Gods favour are at hand. *2. Sam. 19. 26. If I shall find favour in the sight of the Lord, saith David, he will bring me back again: but if he say, I have no delight in thee: behold here am I, let him doe to me what seemeth good unto him.* Now David is not far from deliverance, when he is content that God should fulfill his own pleasure upon him whatsoever it be; and that this is the method that God is wont to observe in the way of his providence towards his people, the Apostle tells you, *Rom. 5. 3, 4. Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience, experience, and experience hope; which maketh not ashamed.* It's a mistake in the mystery of providence, to look for experience of mercy in deliverance, before the work of patience in self-resignation to the will of God. Thus of the 3d. thing.

4. The next general Head is to demonstrate to your Faith, that such a Fast as is of Gods choosing shall have such an issue. This is hard to believe in times of temptation, therefore we do to boot urge our Faith well, upon such a foundation that cannot fail. I shall mention these,

i. That if God should fail to manifest his acceptance of his people upon this account, then these and those that are under the powerfull com-

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command of seeking his face, should seek his face in vain; but saith God *I have not said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain. Isa. 43. 19.*

2. The gracious promises that are before us are a sufficient security that a Fast that God hath chosen, shall bring such gracious acceptation; as those eight promises mentioned, and also *Psal. 30. 13. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.* And so, *1 Kin. 8. 38.* with many other verses before and after: and Christ himself also promiseth, that whatsoever ye shall ask in his name he will do it for you *&c. John. 14. 14.*

3. The manner of Gods dealing with his servants establisheth this truth unto us, *Psal. 119. 132. 133. &c. Be mercifull unto me, as thou usest to doe to those that love thy name.*

4. That God doth not suffer the Fastings and the Prayers of others when they are hearty though not spiritual, to goe without their reward. The young Ravens shall not cry unto him, but he will take care of them; he respects a very Ahab that sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, *1 Kin. 21. 25.* and yet *v. 29. Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring thee evil in his dayes.* And so when Nineveh humbled themselves, he saved them from destruction though it was against the very grain of the soul of Jonah. *Jon. 3. 10 Lastly.* It must needs be so, because there is nothing stands in the way to hinder it. A Fast that God hath chosen removes all impediments that stand in the way of mercy, the great obstruction is some sin committed, or some habitual impenitency remaining, for when the heart is truly humbled and broken, the soul is prepared for some degree of mercy, wherein the acceptation of the Suppliant may be made manifest. Thus of the fourth general Head.

V. The next thing is the Reason why God will do thus for his people, upon their fasting the Fast which God hath chosen?

Answer 1. Negatively. not for any inherent excellency in their fastings and prayers, or services, for what benefit hath God by our humbling our selves, laying aside our Ornaments, & so humbling our bodies, or by our diligent attention to external actions, but positively I shall give you three reasons of it.

Reas. 1. Because it is a Fast that he hath chosen, and therefore it is so successfull: were it of mans chusing, it might be disappointed, and yet God not dishonoured; but he chuseth it and appoints it, and now Gods honour lyes at stake for a gracious answer. It was the glory of God in Israel, to be manifestly near to that people in all they called upon him for. *&c.*

Reas. 2

Reas. 2. Because the persons are accepted (if such persons) and therefore their offerings are accepted also. The Petition of a favourite is not easily rejected by the Prince, especially being such a Petition as his Prince hath chosen and appointed for him. They are in a state of favour with God, and therefore their Petitions must needs be successful. The spiritual Sacrifices of this royal holy Priesthood are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, 1 *Pe. 2. 5.*

Reas. 3. Because there is an admirable, mysterious Communion between God the Father, Son and holy Ghost, and the right Suppliant or the person that fasts in the fast which God hath chosen, for 1. there is not an holy prayer put up unto God, but its Original is God the Father, that prayer of Faith which proceeds from the heart of a Christian, was 1. In the heart of God the Father, and he through the Intercession and Mediation of his Son, sends it down by his holy Spirit into the heart of a poor sinner, and so stamps the Image of it upon the heart of the poor sinner that he believes, and then the Holy Ghost that stamped it there, takes it from thence, and presents this through Christ unto the Father, & then the Fathers heart is to give forth the answer through the Intercession of the Son, and to give notice of it to the Soul of a Christian by his holy Spirit. And when thou hast received the answer, the same Spirit works in thy heart to return praise and Thanksgiving by the Son unto the Father, so that here is a marvellous spiritual & mysterious Communion in this, between God the Father, Son and holy Ghost, & the poor believer, & therefore such fasting cannot be in vain. Thus of the fifth general head.

6. Of what concernment this may be unto our selves, and truly it is of very great concernment. We are the people that do succeed Israel. We are *Jacob*. Gods people that are under the same profession as the Lord speaks of them here, *ver. 2. that seek God dayly, and delight to know his ways*, this is our profession, we are a Nation that seek Justice, that is our plea, that we must do right and not forsake the Ordinances of our God, this I say is our profession that we are bound to hearken after Gods will, and enquire after the Ordinances of Justice, we are they that by our dayly practice in appearing before God in solemn Assemblies profess that we delight to approach to him, therefore we are they that have need to take notice of this great and solemn Truth, that the Fast that is not of Gods chusing will be ineffectual, but that which is of Gods chusing will prevail, and that to five or six ends.

1. To build us up in knowledge, there are great mysteries contained in this Truth. I shall touch those that are of present consideration.

1. It teacheth you that there is a vast difference between duty and duty, between religious performances and religious performances, that

which is spoken of fasting reaches through the whole body of Religion, there is a prayer that God hath chosen, and a prayer that God hath not chosen, and so this or that Ordinance or observation there is that which God will own and accept. & there is that which he will not countenance nor bless: our God is a God that will be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth, the manner and the end of our worship discovers what the nature of that service is, or of that particular religious act which we put forth towards him. look then to your own Spirits in your worship of God, as it is said of the person worshipping, so it is true of the worship, *he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, but he that is one inwardly,* (Rom. 2. last verse.) *whof praise is not of men but of God;* you may be outwardly a Christian, and inwardly an heathen in the sight of God, all these are uncircumcised in heart says the Prophet, when he reckons up the Nations together with *Judah*, you may be a Heathen in heart, whilest you are in the outward man a Christian, your Circumcision may become uncircumcision before God; alas what's an outward Baptisme, if your Souls never reach after spiritual Baptisme, if there be the washing with water without the Laver of Regeneration, and the renewing of the holy Ghost, can you rest in that? or will God take pleasure in it? What is it for you to eat the Lords Supper, and not to eat the Lord who is that Supper? that is to receive Christ therein by Faith, mind the Spirit with which, and the end for which you wait upon God in holy Ordinances. What is your prayer, if it be not the prayer which God hath chosen? it's but the expression or voyce of a lust that will not be accepted of God, *1. you ask and have not, b. cause you ask amiss that you may consume it upon your lusts,* there are many mock services whereby mock-Christians mock God in their profession. This is a sad mistery, but necessary to be known, there is a form of godliness without power, this is to make an Image to your selves, and to feed upon husks, and to deceive your own Souls with shadows, which will profit nothing; if you think to put off God with outside services, such have a *form of godliness but deny the power thereof,* 2 Tim. 3. 5. *from such turn away.*

2. It concerns us to know how hard it is to awaken a secure sinner that is covered under a form of godliness: take a profane person and the whole power of common Light, and common principles of humanity will fall in with the conviction of his miserable lost condition: tell a Drunkard that he shall drink in Hell for this, his conscience tells him so, when he is sober. So an Adulterer his Conscience being awakened tells him he shall suffer Eternal Torment for his moments pleasure. So a gringing person his Conscience falls in with the Conviction, but a man under

a form of godliness without the power thereof, hath a really salve for every sore, he stoppeth his Ears with his Tongue, and becomes as the deaf Adder, hence saith God unto this people, *Is this the Fast that I have chosen?* and inculcates it again and again, *It is not the Fast that I have chosen, &c.* and calls upon the Prophet, ver. 1. *Cry aloud, cry out in thy throat, spare not, lift up thy voice like a Trumpet, that thou mayst awaken them to the consideration of their sin.*

3. It concerns us to know that all our spiritual duties & services must come to the trial, God will not only call us to account for all our open wickedness & gross acts of Transgression but will try every service we perform; *Is this the Fast that I have chosen,* sayes God? was it such a prayer, such a participation in this or that Ordinance? Is this your Conference, are these the holy meetings, are these the Sabbaths? thus God will ask you, and God will accept none of your Services but they must pass through Gods tryal; Therefore we have need to examine our own Services, and our hearts in them, you are in your Closets meditating, but is this the meditation God hath chosen for Spirit, for matter & for manner? you are crying and praying, but is this the prayer that God hath chosen? you are reproving, counselling admonishing your Children or others, but is it in the way that God hath chosen? you are dealing with your Neighbour or brother for some Transgression, but is it such an admonition as God hath chosen? remember that all your actions must come under this question, whether or no they are such as God hath chosen? *I chuse out their way for them,* sayes Job, of the time when he was as King among them, so if Christ be your King, he shall chuse your way for you, and you will chuse the things that please the Lord, and will not take any contentment in that which doth not answer the Lords expectation.

2. As it is of great concernment for our knowledge, so it concerns us for our examination & trial, to try our ways before the Lord our God, if God will try our fastings, prayers, & other services, we had need to try & examine our selves. To judge our selves is the way to prevent Gods Judgements. Briefly examine we our selves concerning this our present Fast, is it a *Fast which God hath chosen*, as to our preparation for it? have you had solemn and serious thoughts concerning the way of Gods providence, concerning your persons, your Families, your Relations &c. have you considered your own Transgressions before God, & the great cause you have had of deep humiliation before God in respect of them? The defect of this is a failing of Gods expectation in the beginning, however you may obtain in the procedure; have you been careful to abstain from natural, necessary comforts & refreshings, further then necessity in

Spect of infirmity calls for; and hath your abstinence proceeded from inward self-aborrancy, because of your sins: Extream grief takes away the appetite to eating and drinking. All the self denying acts that are required in a Fast are to proceed from a deep affliction of heart, otherwise it is but a shallow performance, & of no worth with God; it is therefore called the afflicting of the soul, and if it doe not come from Soul-affliction, it will be very unprofitable & unacceptable. Again, are we real; are our hearts through with God in that solemn profession we make in such a day as this? Are you indeed sensible of your sins whereby you have provoked the Lord: Our particular sins, the sins of our Families, towns Churches, and the sins of the Country? Doe we sincerely look out to God in Jesus Christ for the Spirit of Repentance? Is it his grace indeed that we look unto for help and succour, and that in the very mediation of Christ Jesus, through his death and blood-shed? Where is that spiritual self-aborrancy that should act and carry an end these holy services? Is there indeed a forgiving spirit? When you come before God are not your hearts, many of you, full of wrath & anger, are you meekened like lambs before the Lamb of God in your holy offerings? Doe you present your selves upon that Altar which is the Lamb? Or do you fast for strife and debate, longing to be at it again, that you may manifest your displeasure when the time is over? And is there in you a spirit of compassion and working of bowels toward the poor and needy, whilst you are seeking mercy from God? Do you oblige and ingage your hearts to return to God, and to reform what is amiss in your persons, Families, Churches, &c. according to the object of your work, & where you may have influence to the utmost of your power? The Lord help us solemnly to examine our selves, for if it be not thus with us, it's not the *Fast which God hath chosen*: and mind what your sin is,

1. It's like the worshipping of an Idol; you have turned an holy Ordinance into loathsome Idolatry, & (as I may speak with holy reverence) you have carried it towards God, as if he had been one of the Idols of the Gentiles.

2. You have taken the Name of God in vain this day in an extraordinary manner, and so put an extraordinary dishonour upon God, which is a most horrible profanation of the day, which should be kept as a Sabbath; to keep it only with outward observance, without an heart spiritually disposed, and graciously inclined, will you call this an acceptable day to the Lord?

Lastly. Consider what will be the wofull issue, and evill consequence of it upon your selves, except God give you repentance of your forma-

lity in your Services: instead of softening it will harden you, instead of mortifying sin, it will quicken it; instead of obtaining grace, it will bring displeasure; it will drive the Spirit of God from you, and bring Satan near unto you, and instead of the good you desire, it will bring about the contrary evil; you will be the worse for it, & not the better: where was there greater wickedness effected, then hath been done by Fasting & Prayer? See the horrible wickedness in the matter of Naboth, *1 Kis. 2* & was ever woman more hardened then *Jezebel*? & who like *Ahab* that sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom *Jezebel* stirred up. 'Tis the way to be sealed up under the Tomb-stone of an hard heart to celebrate a Fast with another Spirit, manner, and end then God hath chosen: Woeful ill consequents come upon persons and Families upon this account, commonly after a Fast, or solemn Ordinance, if not performed according to God; men, women, and children are the worse in their practice: *Mal. 2. 13.* and this have you done again covering the Altar with tears, &c. Inasmuch that he regards not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand; when men will fast and pray and cover Gods Altar with tears, and yet hold fast their carnal, corrupt, and impenitent frame of heart, they will be worse and worse in their places and Relations as there he speaks of the wife of youth against whom they had dealt treacherously, &c. And alas what outward miseries will it bring upon a Family, *1 Cor. 1. 29, 30.* because in eating the Supper of the Lord, they did not eat it, therefore one was sick, another weak, and another fallen asleep, so if in fasting you do not fast, if in humbling your Souls, you do not humble your Souls, if in praying, you pray not, if you perform not such Services as God hath chosen, it will bring sickness upon those that are well and weakness and death upon the sick. It's mercy when we are thus judged of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world, *1 Cor. 11.* latter end.

Again it concerns us to consider what evil Consequents will come upon a people in this case, whence comes wars? whence comes Famine? whence plagues? these, and those Judgements upon a professing people? because their worship is not worship, their godliness, their fasting and prayer is not such as God hath chosen, there is not the life and power of godliness in what they offer up to God and this provokes God to deal dreadfully with them, when lighter afflictions will not prevail. This brought desolation to *Jerusalem*, because *they fasted to themselves, and not to the Lord*, *Zach. 7. 13, 14.* Therefore it is come to pass that as he cried and they would not hear, so they cried and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts, but I scattered them with a Whirlwind, &c. For they laid the pleasant Land desolate.

Again.

Again, it concerns those of us that are true observers of such a Fast as God hath chosen. it concerns them for their consolation as here in the dayes of the Prophet *Isaiah*, when God was pleased to set so many precious hopes before them for themselves and their posterity, what a comfort was it, &c. This is like to be your portion if God hath inclined your hearts to seek his Name.

1. *Object.* But you will say, these promises are indeed very glorious, but how can I take comfort in them? since I find my self falling so exceedingly short in the qualifications required thereto?

1. Answer, you must distinguish between falling short in degree, and in the whole. if there be in you no degree of these spiritual qualifications you must even wait upon God, in pressing upon your hearts the dreadful consequences thereof, but if there be any, though the least degree, I would not discourage you, for when we speak of Evangelical duties, we must understand the qualifications in a Gospel sense, God looks at sincerity, and accepts the uprightness of the heart though accompanied with much infirmity.

2. *Object.* Another may say, I have laboured many a year, and cannot find my prayers thus answered. — *Answer.* We ought not to judge our selves by the Issues of Divine providence, but by the operations of Gods Spirit in us, if the work have been gracious in thy heart, the Issue shall be glorious to thy Soul in the end, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.

3. *Object.* But if these things be necessary to an acceptable Fast, what benefit is there in a publick Fast, wherein the most do fall short of what is required thereto?

Answer. Whosoever falls short, thou that dost keep this Fast that God hath chosen, shalt have the blessing thereof. Therefore look to thine own heart, and thou shalt receive the Testimony of his gracious acceptance, God knows how to save the good Figs, when he destroys a whole Nation of bad, he can find an Ark for a *Noah*, and cull out eight persons from a whole world to shew them his Salvation. Besides publick Fasts procure at least Reprieves. God will wait to see the fruit of it, and not put a full end to his patience, till there is no hope of answering Humiliation by Reformation.

And lastly, it concerns every one of us, to look diligently to our own Souls, when we have any such service to perform to the Lord our God that it be so done by us as God hath appointed, and that we repent of what hath not been according to Gods mind, and that we take care, that what remains may make it a Fast after Gods own choice.

*Q*uery is that poſſible? Yes if now at laſt thy Soul truly repents of thy ſin, and be humbled and melts before God for thy carnality, thy unpreparedneſs for the day, and thy unſpiritualneſs in the day. And looking unto Chriſts Mediation for pardon, and acceptation, truſting in his gracious help, you take up reſolutions to return to God, and to exerciſe mercy and loving kindneſs amongſt men and to do Juſtice and Judgement, and to walk righteouſly, holily, and humbly with thy God. it may turn this very Faſt into a time of joy. and in Gods gracious acceptation, may be eſteemed ſuch a Faſt as God hath choſen.

I would propound a few things here to your conſideration as the Iſſue of this your Faſt, and but propound them briefly.

1. Look into your own hearts, get alone and conſider what it is that hath been amiſs in hearts and lives for time paſt, and ſet a narrow watch over your Souls for time to come, that you may not provoke God, and becauſe you are weak and infirm, intreat God to ſet a watch over you by his holy Spirit.

2. Now take up a reſolution to walk with God, in your houſe in a perfect way, that neither your ſelves nor your Relations may be the worſe for your Faſtings. and that Judgment may not come upon you in your houſe, becauſe you have not glorified God in his houſe.

3. Uſe your utmoſt intereſt for publick good, for the free paſſage of Juſtice and Judgment, Righteouſneſs and Peace in the Common-wealth and Churches; and though you have no power of your ſelves, wreſtle with God for it that it may be ſo.

4. Take care that you hold faſt the word of Gods patience in the time of your triall, hold it faſt in Faith and practice, remember that word, *He that continues to the end ſhall be ſaved.* And again, *Let no man take away thy crown.* It is a day of tryal, but look to it, that you may be found upright in the day of tryal.

Laſtly. Be open hearted, and open-handed to thoſe that are in miſery and affliction; *Bleſſed are the mercifull, for they ſhall find Mercy.*

Now to him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church of Chriſt Jeſus, throughout all ages world without end, Amen.

E I N I S.